

Private Information

Objective: To learn that the answers written on the form are kept confidential.

Background Information:

- Federal law (Title 13, United States Code) mandates that no one outside the Census Bureau can be given any information that would enable him or her to connect answers on the form with the name and address of the person who filled it out.
- It is illegal for any information gathered by the Census Bureau about an individual to be shared with any other government agency — including the IRS (Internal Revenue Service), FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), housing authorities, and federal or state welfare programs.
- Census workers are sworn to secrecy before they are permitted to look at a completed census form. Anyone who violates the oath faces a sizeable fine and a prison term.
- By law, the Census Bureau is prohibited from selling or giving away any name or address from a census form.
- The way that census data are tabulated also insures privacy: individual answers from the census form are aggregated to produce statistical summaries. No information that can be traced to an individual is ever published. Individual records are held confidential for 72 years.
- The Census Bureau uses many security measures to protect information, including electronic barriers, scrambling devices, and dedicated phone lines.

Getting Started:

Call students' attention to the We Count! wall map. Point out the total population of your state. Explain that this number is based on the census forms that were returned in your state in

Extension Activity

Emphasize that there are no risks to filling out the form, only benefits. Have class members discuss how the census benefits their community.

Have students add Activity Sheet 4 to their Census Booklets.

1990. Although individual names were collected on the form, the Census Bureau will not disclose this information to anyone, not even the president.

Using the Activity Sheet:

1. Explain that students are going to demonstrate how it is possible to collect and display information about individuals in such a way that each individual's identity is protected.
2. Have each student use a separate sheet of paper to write the name of the month in which he or she was born. Collect the papers.
3. Draw a chart with 12 boxes on the chalkboard. Label the boxes with the names of the months. Write the number of students born in each month in the corresponding box. Point out that by looking at the chart, there is no way to tell which individual is born in which month.
4. Photocopy and distribute Activity Sheet 4. Read the text in the box with your class explaining that "true" and "false" have been translated into Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Tagalog. Then have students answer the true/false questions. Wrap up the lesson with a discussion about the confidentiality of census information.

Summary:

Review with students how their identities are kept confidential throughout the census process, emphasizing the laws, security measures, and data compilation techniques that protect their privacy.

Answers, p.10:

1. True 2. True 3. False 4. False

Read the statements below, then circle true or false for questions 1–4 at the bottom of the page.

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When I fill out the census form, my information may be available to anyone.

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Nothing is further from the truth. Your answers are protected by the strictest privacy law in the nation. That means NO ONE, not even other government agencies, can get your personal information from the Census. It's that simple.

1. There is a law to protect the privacy of your answers on the census form.

True False

2. Other government agencies cannot see the personal information you write on your census form.

True False

3. The Census Bureau can share information from your census form with others.

True False

4. The president can see the information from your census form.

True False